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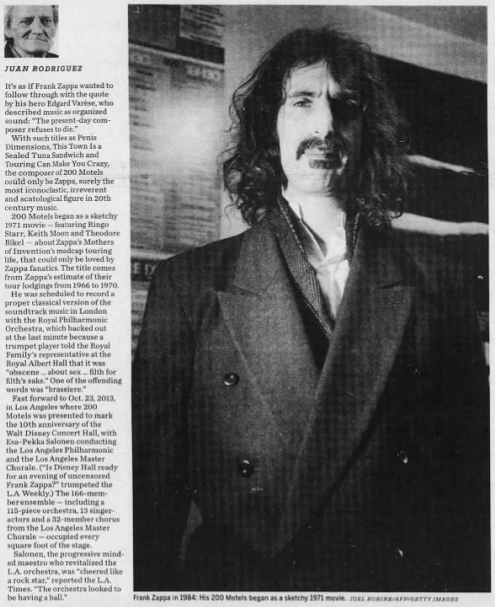
# ONE MORE FOR ZAPPAPHILES

**Frank Zappa: 200 Motels — The Suites** is the 101st album of the artist Juan Rodriguez calls the most irreverent figure in 20th century music



Frank Zappa in 1984: His 200 Motels began as a sketchy 1971 movie. JOEL ROBINS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



JUAN RODRIGUEZ

It's as if Frank Zappa wanted to follow through with the quote by his hero Edgard Varèse, who described music as organized sound: "The present-day composer refuses to die."

With such titles as Penis Dimensions, This Town Is a Sealed Tuna Sandwich and Touring Can Make You Crazy, the composer of 200 Motels could only be Zappa, surely the most iconoclastic, irreverent and scatological figure in 20th century music.

200 Motels began as a sketchy 1971 movie — featuring Ringo Starr, Keith Moon and Theodore Bikel — about Zappa's Mothers of Invention's madcap touring life, that could only be loved by Zappa fanatics. The title comes from Zappa's estimate of their tour lodgings from 1966 to 1970.

He was scheduled to record a proper classical version of the soundtrack music in London with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, which backed out at the last minute because a trumpet player told the Royal Family's representative at the Royal Albert Hall that it was "obscene ... about sex ... filth for filth's sake." One of the offending words was "brassiere."

Fast forward to Oct. 23, 2013, in Los Angeles where 200 Motels was presented to mark the 10th anniversary of the Walt Disney Concert Hall, with Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Master Chorale. ("Is Disney Hall ready for an evening of uncensored Frank Zappa?" trumpeted the L.A Weekly.) The 166-member ensemble — including a 115-piece orchestra, 13 singer-actors and a 32-member chorus from the Los Angeles Master Chorale — occupied every square foot of the stage.

Salonen, the progressive minded maestro who revitalized the L.A. orchestra, was "cheered like a rock star," reported the L.A. Times. "The orchestra looked to be having a ball."

Frank Zappa: 200 Motels — The Suites, the two-CD recording of the event, released last week (by Ume/Universal), was Zappa's 101st album, and the last supervised by his widow, Gail, who tirelessly shepherded his posthumous releases (at least 30), as well as compiling her incredibly articulate husband's major interviews, available on the web (at afka.net/Articles/index.htm).

Add this to Dance Me This, the last album he worked on, his most accessible work on the very expensive Synclavier, a machine that could replicate any sound and is now obsolete due to samplers; Roxy The Movie, a warm and relaxed set filmed at the Hollywood nightclub with his 1973-74 band, featuring keyboardist-singer George Duke, that many think was his best ensemble; and new recordings A Token of His Extreme (recorded at KCET Los Angeles (1974), Hammersmith Odeon (1978) and Feeding the Monkies at Ma Maison (a short Synclavier excursion into the world of Hollywood snobbery), and it adds up to a bonanza for Zappaphiles.

"Frank wrote music that challenges your playing ability and I think musicians embrace that," Gail told Billboard. "I believe in my heart of hearts that someone on the board (of the L.A. Philharmonic) said it's about time. This music was written before our children were even conceived and they have never had a chance to hear his music in a proper concert hall."

Salonen had said that Zappa was the first person to call and welcome him to the L.A. Philharmonic, in 1992, a year before his death, at 52, of prostate cancer. Gail died Oct. 7 of lung cancer, at 70.

Before the concert, Salonen told Variety, the show biz bible, that he was "very attracted" by Zappa's "anarchic, irreverent spirit ... It goes between the trashiest of sentiments to real interesting and really profound thoughts and everything in between ... The one thing that's completely missing from (200 Motels) is reverence."

Salonen joins other heavyweight classical conductors Kent Nagano, Pierre Boulez, Zubin Mehta and Michael Tilson Thomas in presenting his music.

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